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JOSEPH BARRATT, M.D.

PHYSICIAN AND BOTANIST OF MIDDLETOWN, CONN.

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FRANK K. HALLOCK, M.D.

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Half a century and more ago many of the sidewalks of Middletown were made of flat pieces of brown stone obtained from the quarries of the neighboring town of Portland. At this period—the sixties and seventies of 1800—if you chanced to be a resident of Middletown and walked on certain streets you would frequently notice the bent-over figure of a man seriously scrutinizing or tracing with his cane the real or fancied fossil imprints on the brown stone slabs.

This man was Dr. Joseph Barratt, past 60 years of age and at a time in his life when the geological monomania which possessed him was operating at full force. Woe be to you if your time was limited and you stopped for a moment to show a passing interest in what he was doing. The glittering eye of another ancient mariner would transfix you and you could not escape from a part, at least, of the story he had to tell. Prof. William North Rice, the well-known geologist of Wesleyan University, relates that on one occasion, failing to make the customary detour, he was halted by the doctor as he attempted to slip by him unnoticed. No excuse availed; the professor was compelled to listen to the emphatic declaration that the marks on the stone indicated the outline of a human form and that a prehistoric man had once reposed there. In eager tones Dr. Barratt invited the professor to lie down and demonstrate how closely his figure would match the tracings on the rock. Needless to say, only a few indefinite markings could be seen and the professor, in spite of his great zeal for science refused to prostrate himself on the dusty sidewalk.

It may seem rather unfair to his memory thus to introduce Dr. Barratt to you while he was in a distinctly paranoid state, but I can assure you at once that if you had chanced to meet him in his prime, that is, during the period from 1825 to 1850, your impressions of this truly sterling man would have been very different. Physically he appeared strong and energetic and mentally he was bright and alert, being widely read and possessing keen powers of observation and a retentive memory that made his mind a storehouse of facts regarding every branch of natural science. His manner at times might be a

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\*Read before the Beaumont Medical Club, Hartford, Conn., March 10, 1922. Read before the Middlesex County Historical Association, Middletown Conn., March 21, 1922.

little brusque, for he was somewhat erratic in temperament and you could not be certain of what he might do or say. Superior in knowledge, as he was, to the average citizen and to the majority of his brother practitioners of medicine he was wont occasionally to appear somewhat impatient and egotistic. One with deeper insight, however, would soon discover that his egotism was not due to inherent self-conceit, but to his intense interest in whatever trend of thought was at the time occupying his field of consciousness. He was by nature an industrious student, having the research type of mind, and loved the investigation of all natural phenomena on their own account and not for the exploitation of his own knowledge.

Altogether, making due allowance for his foibles, you would have found Dr. Barratt a very interesting personality, certainly from the intellectual if not from the social standpoint. Indeed, his intellectual ability would have impressed you so strongly that you would have said, "Here is a man capable of doing great things if he would focus his attention and apply himself consistently to one field of endeavor."

Although Dr. Barratt did accomplish something of value and distinctly worth while, still it was all fragmentary and scattering and comparatively little in total amount considering the talents he possessed. Why was this so and why has he not received better recognition for what he did accomplish? The answers to these questions can be readily given by a study of his mental characteristics and habits of life, which, for the most part, will be revealed in recounting such biographical facts as have been gathered from the meager sources of information that are available.

For several years I have been interested in Barratt's history largely as the result of the accounts of him given me by some of the older residents of Middletown who knew the doctor personally. This winter, on beginning to assemble such data as I had collected and search for additional information, I was surprised to find no mention of him in any biographical journal or volume relating to the botanical or other scientific men of America. Even Dr. Howard A. Kelly,<sup>1</sup> who has been anxious to give due credit to American physicians who have excelled in botany, fails to include Barratt in his list—indeed, his name is not mentioned.

The only two biographical sketches that came to my notice were: First, that of Dr. Miner C. Hazen<sup>2</sup> of Haddam, and second, that published in the History of Norwich (Vt.) University.<sup>3</sup> Both were

1. *Some American Medical Botanists*, Troy, N. Y., 1914.

2. *The Centennial History of the Middlesex County Medical Association, Proceedings Connecticut State Medical Society*, New Haven, 1892, pp. 539-581.

3. *History of Norwich University* 2:37-38, 1819-1911.

unsatisfactory, the former on account of its brevity and because the characterization of Barratt was at a time when his mind was drifting toward the abnormal, and the latter because of its conflicting statements. In the History of Middlesex County<sup>4</sup> there is a short paragraph on Barratt in the article, "The Medical Profession in Middlesex County," by Dr. R. W. Mathewson, of Durham. In David Dudley Field's historical account<sup>5</sup> of the Bicentennial of Middletown, in 1850, Barratt served on the Committee of Arrangements and a few lines are written about him as one of the physicians of Middletown.

Some of the comments on Barratt made by Dr. Hazen are the following: "He was an eccentric and original character. He led a kind of homeless life, very irregular in his habits of eating. For days he would eat very little, apparently oblivious of the necessity of food, then when opportunity offered would eat an enormous meal. . . . He was well read in medicine and not averse to the practice of his profession, but he probably rarely collected a bill unless it (payment) was offered him at the time of service. Yet he had some very warm friends and patrons who believed he was very skilful and would have him if possible. He had original and positive ideas on medicine and everything else and was always ready to give his opinion. . . . I consulted him once in regard to a patient, a friend of his. I was giving him, among other things, a laxative pill containing a little aloes. He remonstrated: "What are you giving him aloes for? Don't give aloes to a man. A woman will grow fat on aloes, but to a man aloes is *poison, a rank poison, sir.*"

In the account of Barratt given in the History of Norwich University the statements regarding his date and place of birth, his graduation in medicine from Trinity College in Cambridge, England, and service in the British Army are errors and undoubtedly refer to another Joseph Barratt and not to the subject of this sketch. The obituary notice included in the account and quoted from the Middletown paper, "The Constitution," is essentially correct. It was written by Barratt's personal friend, Mr. H. D. A. Ward. The book for which it is stated that he prepared a chapter on "American Willows" refers to the work of Sir William Hooker on the "Flora of British North America." Although invited to do so, Barratt apparently could not bring himself to the task of preparing the chapter, but did send Sir William his

4. New York, R. T. Beers & Co., 1884, p. 23. This reference and Dr. Hazen's sketch have the same two errors. It was an honorary M.D. he received from Yale in 1834, his original degree was granted in London in 1819, and he died in 1882, not 1881.

5. Centennial Address and Historical Sketches, Middletown, 1853, pp. 7 and 198.

synopsis of sections and notes of the genus, which were used and for which fullest credit was given, three new species and two varieties being ascribed to Barratt as author.

On a recent visit to the New York Botanical Garden to see the forty-eight manuscript letters of Barratt to Professor Torrey and such other related data as the institution possessed, I learned from Dr. John Hendley Barnhart that a new biographer of Barratt had arisen in the past year, Mr. C. A. Weatherby of East Hartford, Conn., a scientific botanist of high repute. These manuscript letters, the local newspapers, a fragmentary diary, some notes and bits of memoranda and occasional references to him in botanical journals represent the final sources of information regarding Barratt's life and work. These have all been examined by Weatherby and he has also studied and put in order Barratt's herbarium, which was purchased by Wesleyan University, together with his mineral collection.<sup>6</sup> The account <sup>7</sup> he gives of Barratt is so complete, just and admirable that it is hard to conceive how anyone can add new facts except in some minor detail. I am happy to have his generous invitation to make free use of his article and other data and I shall do so unreservedly, as the result of my investigations as well as my ideas of Barratt are practically identical with his. I shall not, of course, attempt to speak of Barratt's botanical work, as Weatherby's analysis and criticism of this is that of an expert and stands complete and alone.

This new biographer of Barratt in the opening paragraphs of his paper gives the following estimate of him and his accomplishments:

The figure which results has about it a certain air of failure. He had, one feels, an opportunity. He was a man of real learning, good natural powers of observation and large enthusiasm and industry and had the impulse and desire for original work. He gathered an excellent library, and was the acquaintance or correspondent of some of the best botanists of his time. He lived in a region of considerable botanical interest, then practically unexplored. He ought, it seems, to have been, if not a Muhlenberg or a Torrey, at least another Darlington or Bigelow. In geology his chance was as good. Yet he is remembered today by the older residents of Middletown as a rather amusing eccentric who was wont to go clambering about the Portland quarries with a pencil hung about his neck on a string and his hands full of great sheets of brown paper, on which he made strange drawings of marks in the stone. His memorials are an author-citation or two in current manuals, an occasional reference, not disrespectful, in works on special groups, a half-dozen little-known pamphlets, and a place in John Fiske's essay on "Some

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6. The herbarium was not purchased until 1879 but the mineral collection was obtained many years ago after the College began to develop a museum of Natural History. It was not very large nor especially high grade but it served as the original nucleus of the present fine mineralogical department.

7. Old-Time Connecticut Botanists and Their Herbaria, *Rhodora*, Journal of N. E. Botanical Club, Vol. XXIII, Nos. 270 and 271, June and July, 1921.



cranks and their foibles."<sup>8</sup> His herbarium is probably his most solid and valuable achievement.

Various elements may have contributed to the meagreness of his accomplishment. One was his multiplicity of interests. By profession a physician and teacher, plants, insects and birds, chemistry, mineralogy and meteorology, local history, Indian antiquities and language, and finally geology, engaged his interest by turns and detracted one from another. Lack of money for publication and resultant discouragement may have had their effect. But, looking through what remains of his work, one seems to find a deeper reason—a certain inconclusiveness, a lack of selective and co-ordinating faculty. When he is not supported by the definite structure of a systematic botanical arrangement his articles have a way of trailing off vaguely at the end. He does not finish. That is the usual fate of a mind such as we may suppose his to have been—keen, but disorganized, better at observation than at correlating and interpreting its results.

Dr. Barratt was born Jan. 7, 1796,<sup>9</sup> at Little Hallam, Derbyshire, England. He speaks of having four brothers<sup>10</sup> and one sister and that he found "particulars respecting his ancestors" in the Domesday Book. Evidently when Barratt was working with Asa Gray in Torrey's laboratory he had mentioned the fact of this ancient record, as in Gray's first visit to Europe, in 1839, upon being invited to see the Domesday Book in Westminster Abbey, he wrote:<sup>11</sup> "How a sight of it would electrify Dr. Barratt."

The next three items from his autobiographical memoranda are as follows:

"June 25, 1810. Commenced the study of medicine under Charles Chawner, Esq." He was then fourteen years old.

8. Mr. John H. Sage informs me that there is a tradition that Dr. Barratt was the prototype of one of J. Fennimore Cooper's characters in "The Prairie," namely, Obed Bat, M.D., or Dr. Battius as he preferred to be called. The warrant for this tradition is not clear as in what remains of Barratt's manuscript there is no mention of having met Cooper. His diary states, however, that he left New York on a sloop Aug. 14, 1819, arrived in Albany the 19th and reached Cooperstown the 22d where he remained until Oct. 7th. On a separate slip of paper is the item: "I attended a Camp Meeting in the vicinity of Cooperstown." Perhaps, as Mr. Sage facetiously remarks, Barratt met Cooper at the latter resort. "The Prairie" was published in 1827, eight years after this visit to Cooperstown and the character of Dr. Obed Bat is certainly suggestive of traits possessed by Dr. Barratt.

9. Note by Weatherby: "This is the date given by Barratt himself in his fragmentary diary. The inscription on his tombstone gives 1797, and the printer of the Catalogue of Connecticut Plants generously made it 1707." I may add that at the time of Barratt's death his brother William in Michigan sent Mr. C. A. Pelton, in reply to a request for information, a postal card on which was written: "Born Jan. 7, 1797, at Little Hallam, upon estate Hampstead, Derbyshire, England." A copy of this postal card is still preserved in Mr. Pelton's drug store. The inscription on the tombstone reads, "upon Estate Flamsted."

10. In the Connecticut Hospital for Insane where he died the record stated that he had two brothers in America, one Augustus, in Newburg, N. Y., and the other, William, in Paradise, Grand Traverse County, Michigan.

11. Letters of Asa Gray, Boston, 1894. Vol. I, p. 122.

"Aug. 14, 1816. Resided at Leicester with Sam'l Harris as assistant surgeon." Undoubtedly he was under the tutelage of this surgeon, as he had not received his medical diploma.

"Nov. 2, 1818. Was present at St. George's Hospital when Sir Everard Holm performed the high operation of lithotomy in a new manner."

In 1819, in London, Barratt was granted his two medical diplomas, one dated April 8, from Apothecaries Hall, giving him license to practice as an apothecary, and the other, a certificate dated April 29, from the Theater of Anatomy, signed by Joshua Brookes, member of the Royal College of Surgeons. These diplomas were acquired after Barratt's death and given me by the late William E. Hulbert of Cromwell. In this connection Mr. R. L. DeZeng, of Middletown, who was very friendly with Barratt, related to me the following story told him by the doctor many years ago: On the occasion of bestowing medical degrees it was the custom for the dean of the faculty to call the candidate before him and ask him a number of questions on the various subjects of study. When Barratt's turn came he was put to the test more than the usual number of times, so he thought. Finally the dean started to hand him his diploma, then paused and said, "Oh, there is one more question I would like to ask you." Barratt immediately replied, "If you don't think I have answered enough of your questions you may keep your diploma!" and walked off. It was two or more weeks before the offended dean relented and the diploma granted.

Thus early were manifested the traits of impatience and impulsive action which either openly as such or in different forms and degrees followed him through life. One may well wonder whether some tilt with his family or with some one else may not have been the deciding factor in taking the next step in his career, namely, going to America. At any rate, on June 17, 1819, he sailed from Liverpool on the ship "Remittance," under command of Capt. Silas Holmes. He reached New York on August 6 after a seven weeks' voyage.

He soon located himself in Philipstown, Putnam County, N. Y., to practice his profession and continue his study of botany, in which he had become deeply interested. In December of the same year he returned to New York to obtain a license to practice in New York State. In the "Minutes of the Medical Society of the County of New York" <sup>12</sup> I found this item recorded at the meeting held Dec. 17, 1819:

Mr. Joseph Barratt having produced satisfactory testimonials of study to the Comitia Minora, and been examined by them, he was recommended to the Society for a public examination, which was accordingly held, after which he retired, and the Society voted him a license; on being again introduced, the

<sup>12</sup>. Minutes of the Med. Soc. of the Co. of N. Y., 1806-1878, N. Y. 1879, Vol. I, p. 172.

Vice-President (who had, during the examination, appeared and taken the chair) communicated to him the sense of the Society, whereupon he was invested with all the rights and privileges thereunto appertaining.

His name does not appear again on the records of the society, either on the roll of members or in the minutes of meetings.

Weatherby, in speaking of his practice of "physic" in Philipstown and his botanical exploration of the surrounding country, says: "To the usefulness of the latter work Torrey pays special tribute in the preface to his *Flora of New York*, and he might have done as much for the former, since Barratt in his capacity as physician brought him safely through a fever. Barratt had made his acquaintance in 1822 and for more than twenty years remained his correspondent and occasional visitor."

In July, 1824, Barratt moved to Norwich, Vt., accepting a call to become surgeon and professor of chemistry, botany and mineralogy in Capt. Alden Partridge's American Literary, Scientific and Military Academy. Capt. Partridge was a noted graduate and former superintendent of West Point with advanced ideas on the education of youth. He founded the academy, or "scientific institution," as Barratt called it, Aug. 6, 1819. It was successfully conducted, but for some reason Capt. Partridge decided in 1824-1825 to remove to Middletown, Conn., where a new academy was being built for him.

While Barratt was in Vermont he visited the White Mountains and on Sept. 18, 1824, ascended Mount Washington.<sup>13</sup> A year from this time, September, 1825, he returned to Philipstown and later in the fall visited New York and there met the noted Moravian botanist, Lewis David Von Schweinitz of Bethlehem, Pa.<sup>14</sup>

In May, 1826, Barratt again joined Capt. Partridge's faculty and for nearly three years taught chemistry, botany and mineralogy in the academy at Middletown. Capt. Partridge had appealed in vain to the Connecticut Legislature for financial assistance in conducting his

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13. Weatherby's note: "One incident of this journey Barratt related with gusto to Torrey in after years. 'That coarse, long-legged fellow . . . Crawford,' he wrote, 'laughed at the idea of my enduring fatigue, but I gave him such a walk over the mountains, taking him about thirty miles in one day, that he will not soon forget. I tired him out and had to send a horse for him.'"

14. In reference to this visit with Schweinitz, Mr. Weatherby writes me on Feb. 7, 1922. "Mr. C. L. Shear, one of the editors of the recently published correspondence of Schweinitz and Torrey, has pointed out an error in my paper, due to my misreading of a bit of Barratt's manuscript. The meeting with Schweinitz referred to by me on page 123 took place at New York, not at Bethlehem. Barratt himself seems to have been in error in stating that Torrey accompanied him at that time; Torrey's own letters indicate the contrary." (See "*Rhodora*," Vol. 23, No. 276, Dec., 1921, for further comment on this incident.)

academy. He finally became discouraged, closed the institution in 1828-1829 and reopened the academy in Norwich. Dr. Barratt did not accompany him back to Vermont. He remained in Middletown the rest of his life, resuming the practice of his profession and continuing his natural history studies. For the next twenty years he evidently had sufficient practice to keep him comfortable but no more. He was not the kind to gather and lay up funds for the future. Indeed, his devotion to the natural sciences was always paramount and this fact, together with the diversified interests that appealed to his active mind, make it very evident that the practice of medicine was a secondary consideration, a means to enable him to maintain a more or less hand-to-mouth existence.

In 1830 he was naturalized and the following year made a voter. In 1831 Wesleyan University was founded, and while he was never on the faculty of the institution, he did have charge of a class in botany in 1835 and Professor Rice is under the impression that he may have given lectures in chemistry in these first years of the college.

At the annual meeting of the Middlesex County Medical Association, held in Haddam, April 16, 1832, Dr. Barratt was elected a member and thus became also a member of the Connecticut State Medical Society. From this point it will be more satisfactory to follow through his medical record, as told chiefly in the proceedings of the state and county medical societies, and later return to his scientific activities.

In 1833, at the annual meeting of the county society, he was appointed dissertator. He was reappointed in the following year, but apparently never served in this capacity. In the spring of 1834 he was granted an honorary M.D. degree by the Yale Medical School.<sup>15</sup>

In 1836 the county society elected him a Fellow to attend the annual convention of the state society. In his diary is the following item: "May 10-12, 1836. Attended Connt. Med. Soc. at New Haven. A warm debate on the subject of temperance . . . in the course of which I took occasion to offer my views on the evils resulting from a free use and abuse of cyder as a drink and its tendency to bring on rheumatism in those predisposed."

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15. Proceedings Connecticut State Medical Society, New Haven, 1834, pp. 5-6.

"6. Resolved, That a Committee of one from a County be appointed to recommend a candidate for the Honorary Degree of Doctor in Medicine, for Honorary membership, and for gratuitous attendance on lectures in the Medical Institute.

"The Committee on the Sixth Resolution having reported, it was voted to recommend to the President and Fellows of Yale College the following gentlemen as candidates for the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Medicine." Among the eight physicians recommended was Joseph Barratt of Middletown.

There appears in the records no evidence of Barratt attending any further medical meetings until that of the county society in October, 1845, when he took part in the discussion on Belladonna and Hyoscyamus. At the same meeting he also read a paper on "Diseases of the United States for the Last Forty-six Years," which he stated was intended as a continuation of Noah Webster's book on epidemics. The paper was not discussed nor recommended for publication.

His final attendance at a medical meeting was that of the county society held Oct. 16, 1851. He discussed with others the subject of venesection. At the meeting of April 24, 1862, he was dropped from the society for nonpayment of dues. By this act he also lost his membership in the state society, his name ceasing to appear on the list of members in the proceedings for 1862. At this time it should be remembered he had practically lost all interest in everything except his geological investigations. In spite of his evident indifference toward maintaining an active relation with his professional brethren, he kept up his membership in the county and state societies for thirty years. Although better qualified to write on medical subjects than the average physician of his time, he apparently contributed very little that reached publication in medical journals. . Thus far I have been unable to find only one small article entitled "Poisoning by Opium; a Case of Successful Treatment by Flagellation Where a Large Dose of Laudanum Was Taken," reported in the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*<sup>16</sup> and quoted by Graves in his "Clinical Lectures," published 1838.<sup>17</sup>

In *The Classic*, or college monthly<sup>18</sup> conducted by the students of Wesleyan University, it states that a physiological society was formed May 18, 1842. Although it was chiefly a college organization, many of the best physicians of Middletown belonged to it. Barratt never joined the society. The Central Medical Association, the local medical society for Middletown and vicinity, was founded Nov. 17, 1847. Barratt's name does not appear on the list of members nor in the minutes of the meetings.

Turning now from his medical record to that of his scientific and other activities, we find evidence of distinctly greater interest on his part. The local newspapers, especially the "Sentinel and Witness," contain numerous communications in the form of letters, comments and longer articles indicating that, beside the practice of his profession and more or less constant devotion to botany, Barratt played the part

16. Vol. XIV, No. 13, May 4, 1836, pp. 197-199.

17. Clinical Lectures, delivered 1834-1837, by R. J. Graves, M.D., of Trinity College, Dublin. Phila., 1838, pp. 265-6 (Dunglison's American Medical Library.

18. Vol. II, No. 12, June, 1842.

of an active citizen. He served on committees, addressed the Farmers' Club on a variety of subjects, proposed restocking the Connecticut River with salmon, advocated cheap postage, kept meteorological records, studied and made observations on the growing season, frosts, rainfall, spring floods of the river, etc. At this time of his prime he responded to any interest that appealed to him, spattering himself, one might say, over a wide range of scientific and semi-civic subjects, but never, or at least very seldom, pushing his investigations far enough to yield a complete and satisfactory result.

The early association of Barratt with Prof. Asa Gray furnishes a botanical item of passing interest. It was probably in the first half of the 1830 decade, according to Professor Rice, who tells the story, that Barratt paid one of his occasional visits to his friend, Dr. Torrey, to study in his laboratory in New York. Asa Gray, then a young man, was also there as an associate. Gray was describing a new species of compositae which had come from Mexico, and he decided to name it in honor of his co-worker, "Barrattia," adding an adjective signifying "bald," which described part of the plant and also Barratt's bald head. Professor Torrey knew that Gray was a good deal of a wit, and when he came to examine the specimen and saw the name given to it he looked up at Gray and, smiling knowingly, said it would be better to omit the descriptive adjective.

The year 1834 must have been an eventful one in the life of Barratt, for he not only received his honorary M.D. from Yale, but he also read his first and only paper before a scientific society of national importance. This was a "Monograph of North American Willows," before the New York Lyceum of Natural History. Presumably at or near this date he was elected a corresponding member of the lyceum. There is no doubt of his election, but his name does not appear on the membership lists, due, it is believed, to carelessness in keeping the records. He was elected a correspondent of three other high grade American scientific societies, as follows:

The Yale Natural History Society, at the second annual meeting, Nov. 25, 1835.

The Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, Oct. 31, 1837.

The National Institution for the Promotion of Science at Washington, afterwards the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The association proceedings for 1848 (first meeting) and for 1859 list Barratt as a member.<sup>19</sup>

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19. The Proceedings for 1851 give the name J. P. Barratt, Barrattsville, S. C. (a practicing physician of scientific standing but not the Barratt of Middletown). The 1859 list again gives Joseph Barratt of Middletown. J. P. Barratt not being shown. The 1869 and all subsequent lists do not have Barratt's name.

In 1836 he assisted in founding the Cuvierian Society of Wesleyan and was its president for a number of years. In *The Classic*<sup>20</sup> it states that the society was organized in April, 1836, and had about fifty members. It comments as follows:

"Besides the truly commendable efforts of its own members, we are happy to name as one of the most efficient and zealous promoters of its interests, J. Barratt, M.D., of this place, eminent indeed, for his successful and unwearied industry in the pursuit of the natural sciences." Three pages are then given to an epitomized report of Barratt's remarks at the meeting of March 27, 1841. The numerous and varied list of topics that he discussed must have made a long session for his audience.

In the second volume of *The Classic* are reports of the various meetings of the Cuvierian Society, revealing Barratt's great interest in its work. The following are some of the subjects he wrote about or discussed:

List of Plants collected July 15, 1841, by E. W. Southwick on the White Mountains of New Hampshire with Notes and References by J. Barratt, M.D.  
The Verticillate Eupatoriums of North America.

A supplement to the North American Carices, found about Middletown this Season.

On the Changes of Autumnal Foliage.

Extracts from a Paper on the Principal Herbals of Europe.

The Weather.

Remarks on the Unios of the Connecticut River.

Exhibited a valuable collection of plants from Alabama.

At about 1845 Barratt began to develop a keen interest in the local history of the Indians. His two pamphlets, "Key to the Indian Language of New England" and "Indian Proprietors of Mattabeseck," were afterwards included in a third paper, "The Indian of New England," of which three editions were issued in less than a month. His acquaintance with the Indian Nicola Tenesles enabled him to acquire first-hand knowledge of the customs and especially the language of the race here in New England.

Soon after the Bicentennial of Middletown, in 1850, Barratt began to show, as Weatherby expresses it, "his final, and fatal, interest in geology." The sandstone deposit in the Portland quarries offered a fertile field for paleontological speculation upon the evidences so frequently found of prehistoric plant and animal life.

John Fiske, whose boyhood was spent in Middletown and who was a very appreciative friend of the doctor, thus summarizes in his essay, "Some Cranks and Their Crochets,"<sup>21</sup> Barratt's mistaken ideas:

20. "The Classic," Vol. I, No. 11, May, 1841, pp. 563-567.

21. Atlantic Monthly, March, 1899, Vol. 83, p. 292, and "A Century of Science and Other Essays," Boston, 1899, pp. 455-459.



He (Barratt) accepted with enthusiasm the geological proofs of the antiquity of Man in Europe, and presently undertook to reinforce them by proofs of his own gathering in the Connecticut Valley. An initial difficulty confronted him. The red sandstone of that region belongs to the Triassic period, the oldest of the secondary series. It was an age of giant reptiles, contemporary with the earliest specimens of mamalian life, and not a likely place in which to look for relics of the highest mammals. But Dr. Barratt insisted that his freestone is Eocene, thus bringing it into the tertiary series; and while geologists in general were unwilling to admit the existence of man before the Pleistocene period, he boldly carried it back to the Eocene. Thus by adding a few million years to the antiquity of mankind and subtracting a few million from that of the rocks, he was enabled at once to maintain that he had discovered in the Portland freestone the indisputable remains of an ancient human being, with only three fingers, upon whom he bestowed the name of *Homotridactylus*.<sup>22</sup> For companions he gave this personage four species of kangaroo, and from that time forth discoveries multiplied.

To illustrate the strength of Barratt's conviction that his geological and paleontological interpretations were correct I will relate the following incident told me by Professor Rice: In 1859 the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science was held in Springfield, Mass. Professor Rice, then a young man, was living in Springfield and attended the meeting. The president of the Section on Natural History and Geology was Prof. Edward Hitchcock, not only one of the foremost geologists of the country, but also a pioneer in correctly interpreting the fossil imprints of the Connecticut Valley sandstones. Dr. Barratt had urgently appealed to him to be allowed to read a paper and present specimens to the section. This Professor Hitchcock refused to do, being fully cognizant of Barratt's eccentricities and false geological theories. The meeting was held in the City Hall and in some way during the night before Barratt obtained permission from the city officials to hang his drawings upon the walls. When the members and guests of the association arrived they were much amused at the sketches and unwarranted labels and explanations attached. Indeed, the claims made were so absurd that they laughed outright. Barratt circulated among them more or less freely and was oblivious of the fact that they were laughing at him. He thought their mirth was directed against Dr. Hitchcock and, making bold, exclaimed: "See what a fool Hitchcock has made of himself in not permitting me to read my paper and show my specimens!"

As the geological monomania developed, Barratt's visionary reasoning gradually became more fantastic and expansive. For instance, he would not use the term "triassic" to denote the era of Connecticut sandstone, but invented the name "kalorimazoic," which he meant to stand for warm-blooded animals. In his last publication, "Fossil

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<sup>22</sup> In Barratt's writings it reads "four toes" and the name is "*Homotetradactylos*."



Wonders of a Former World," in 1874, wherever this word is used it is printed in large type and on a line by itself. The seven-page pamphlet is truly a pitiful demonstration of his deluded mind.

Two or three years after this he began to grow more senile and incapable of taking care of himself. Finally, with his mind much impaired and having no funds nor friends properly situated to look after him, the necessary certificate was reluctantly signed by Dr. Elisha B. Nye and he was committed as a town pauper to the Connecticut Hospital for Insane, June 22, 1880.

The following is a brief summary of the hospital history of his case: Unmarried; temperate habits; 5¾ feet in height; white hair; brown eyes; full habit; body movements, memory and general mental state that of marked senility; diagnosis, senile dementia; course in hospital that of progressive deterioration with recurring and a final apoplectic attack on Jan. 25, 1882.

Passing in review the foregoing facts of Barratt's life, it is not difficult to understand why, considering his mental endowment, he was more or less of a failure and why his name and memory have not been honored to the extent at least that was deserved. Some of the reasons are the following:

1. His personality. This was not steady nor genial, but jagged, due to his impulsive and self-opinionated traits. He was respected for his learning and he no doubt had spasmodic feelings of human sympathy, but naturally he was rather indifferent to his fellow men. His real love and interest was for material things, the phenomena of nature and their manifestations.

2. The action of his mind approached the broken continuity type; intense interest and effort in one direction, then changing more or less abruptly. Hence he failed to carry through and complete his work.

3. Socially his intense devotion to his own pursuits made him more or less oblivious of the claims of others. He did not properly sense his social relationship. When he joined the county and state medical societies it was evident that the members recognized his ability and endeavored to advance him in their councils. He lacked interest or failed to respond and consequently has never received any special medical recognition in the form of tribute or memoir. The same applies to the scientific societies to which he belonged, as he made no effort to keep in touch with the members or their activities and they soon forgot he existed.

4. His work, as already stated, was comparatively of such a tid-bit character that except for an author citation or brief reference it never attracted the attention of the scientific journals of his day. Some of

his botanical contributions were worthy of publication in this form, but apparently he made no attempt to have them accepted.

5. Finally, his mentally unbalanced attitude and complete absorption in false geological theories during the last twenty years of his life contributed greatly to discredit him and obscure his earlier worth and work.

Of Dr. Barratt's botanical studies, which are his chief credit, I will only say in a general way that his best work was on the willows and sedges and that Wesleyan University considers his herbarium a valued acquisition. To be specific and give a more exact idea of Barratt's accomplishment I will quote a few statements from Weatherby's critique of his work:

Barratt's botanical activities began in England and extended apparently to about 1845. . . . As a botanist, his impulse was toward research and original work. He was interested in the life history and morphology of plants. . . . He made the first and in some cases the only local collection yet known of certain of the rarer plants of Connecticut. . . . He collected and studied especially . . . *Carex* and *Salix*. On the last genus his most considerable work was done. He studied it as opportunity offered, for ten years, growing willows in the gardens of obliging friends, watching them in the wild and making many and complete specimens in flower, fruit and leaf. . . . A vast deal of patient labor and observation went into this work . . . the grouping of the *Salices* is essentially that now in use in our current manuals. . . . In his work on the *Eupatoria*, he anticipates our latest treatment by dividing the group of *E. purpureum* into four species, one new—to which he adds three new varieties. . . .

Barratt planned other, more pretentious, botanical works—the monograph of Willows, already mentioned, and a local flora of Middletown which should be "creditable to this place and myself." How far the latter may have proceeded in manuscript there is now no means of telling; local botanists may well be sorry it was never brought to completion. . . . His herbarium like so much of his work is a thing half-finished. Weatherby then speaks of the neglect of it in Barratt's later years, the inability of the College to give it needed attention at the time it was purchased and the ravages of the herbarium beetle. There remain, however, somewhat less than 10,000 sheets which, in spite of everything, still constitute a valuable collection, not altogether unworthy of the pride Barratt once took in it.

In order to make this account of Barratt reasonably complete I will add a few items of some local interest which, if not recorded, will soon be forgotten.

During the last two years of his life previous to his admission to the hospital, Dr. Barratt lived alone in rooms over Charles A. Pelton's drug store, corner of Main and William Streets. Mr. Pelton is the son of Charles H. Pelton, who printed nearly all of Barratt's publications. He was a patient and long-suffering landlord and Dr. Barratt, owing to his infirmities, was greatly indebted to him for many friendly and generous acts.

The Middlesex County Historical Society at Middletown has in its custody what remain of Barratt's manuscript notes, diary and other papers. The society also has two small photographs of him and a silhouette. One photograph was taken in middle life and from this the small oval cut was made that accompanies his biography in the "History of Norwich University." The other photograph was taken when he was past 70.

Mrs. William H. Phelps of Winsted, Conn., daughter of Charles A. Pelton, has in her possession a small oil portrait of Barratt painted in his early prime. The likeness shows that he had a strong, determined face of the English gentleman type.

The unique tombstone which marks Dr. Barratt's grave in Indian Hill Cemetery at Middletown is thus described in the sketch of him given in the History of Norwich University:

As a recognition of his talents, there has been erected at his grave a monument of Portland freestone in two parts. The base is a block composed of two fossil logs, each 12 inches in diameter and 40 to 45 inches in length, inscribed, "The Testimony of the Rocks." The upper stone is a slab whose face is 27 by 40 inches and whose thickness is 6 inches. The face toward the grave bears an inscription giving his name, profession, date and place of his birth and death, and the reverse is the hardened bed of clay covered with the tracks of the extinct animals known as the Dinosaur Brontozaum Lillimanicum.

His friend, Mr. Charles F. Browning, of Middletown, found the two fossil specimens representing both plant and animal life. Through the courtesy of Mr. Erastus Brainerd, president of the quarry company, the stones were donated and transported to the cemetery free of charge. The legend, "The Testimony of the Rocks," cut in the surface between the two fossil tree trunks, was the happy thought of his friend and former landlord, Mr. Charles A. Pelton. It is the title of one of the books of Hugh Miller, the Scotch geologist. Below the legend one notices a chiseled groove leading from a depression in the rock to the edge. This was done by the friendly hand of Dr. Joseph W. Alsop to safeguard the stone from the effect of the weather.

Weatherby concludes his article with the two following lists, which, in addition to his herbarium, give in briefest form a summary of Barratt's tangible accomplishments:

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Species and varieties published by Barratt, or by others from his notes and over his name, of which there is original material in his herbarium:

*Carex vulpinoidea*, var. *ambigua*, Suppl. N. Am. Carices, No. 62 (1841).

*Carex vulpinoidea*, var. *glomerata*, l. c. No. 61 (1841).

*Eupatorium fistulosum*, *Eupatoria Verticillata* No. 1 (1841).

*Salix balsamifera* in Anderss. Oefvers. Vet. Akad. Foerhandl. xv 125 (1858) (a single leaf only).

*Salix crassa*, Sal. Am. No. 7 (1840).

- Salix Drummondiana in Hook. Fl. Bor. Am. ii 144 (1840).  
 Salix pameachiana, Sal. Am. No. 16 (1840).  
 Salix Scouleriana in Hook. Fl. Bor. Am. ii 144 (1840) (probably this species, though labelled by mistake S. Hookeriana).  
 Salix Torreyana, Sal. Am. No. 29 (1840).  
 Salix tristis, var. monadelphia, l. c. No. 2.  
 Other material of Barratt's willows may be found in the Torrey Herbarium at the New York Botanical Garden, and the Gray Herbarium, and, no doubt, at Kew. The identity of most of his species not already well understood has been worked out by Mr. Camillo Schneider in his recent series of notes on North American Willows in the Botanical Gazette and the Journal of the Arnold Arboretum.

## II

Barratt's publications, so far as known to me, exclusive of letters and other articles in newspapers, of which there are a considerable number in the one complete file extant of the Middletown *Sentinel and Witness*. All items here listed, except as otherwise noted, were published at Middletown and bear the imprint of C. H. Pelton. Nos. 2, 3, 4 and 5 are label-sheets, printed on one side of the paper only. An official acknowledgment from the Linnaean Society of London of a gift of pamphlets, etc., from Barratt, dated March 5, 1842, mentions another publication which I have not seen—"Remarks on the Canker Worm Moth."

1. Plan of Main St., Middletown, showing the buildings and occupants, from about 1770 to 1775. In J. W. Barber Connecticut Historical Collections, 508. New Haven and Hartford. (1836—1st Ed.)
2. Salices Americanae. North American Willows Disposed in Sections or Natural Groups. 1840. 8 pp. qto.
3. North American Carices. 1840. 4 octavo pages.
4. Supplement to the North American Carices. 1841. 1 8vo page.
5. Eupatoria Verticillata: specimens to illustrate the North American verticillate species and varieties of the genus Eupatorium. 1841. 1 folio page.
6. List of Plants collected by Mr. E. W. Southwick on the White Mountains of New Hampshire, July 15, 1841. The Classic, ii, 182-185. 1842. Also reprinted, with changed pagination, together with Southwick's Notes of a Tour to the White Hills of New Hampshire, to which it is in the nature of an appendix.
7. Table to show the period and continuance of Flowering of the Apricot, Peach, Cherry and Apple at Middletown, Conn. . . . Ann. Report of the Regents of the University of the State of New York, lviii, 218-129. 1845.
8. Report on the Season of 1846. 1846, 14 pp. Gives tables of the time of flowering of fruit trees from 1837 to 1846 and of dates of late spring and early fall frosts, etc.
9. Key to the Indian Language of New England in the Etchemin or Passamaquoddy Language . . . derived and written from the Indian Nicola Tenesles. 1850, 8 pp.
10. Indian Proprietors of Mattabeseck and their descendants whose names appear in the town Records from 1673 to 1749. In Addresses delivered at the dedication of the Indian Hill Cemetery, 47-50, Middletown, 1850. Reprinted in Indian Hill Cemetery: By-laws, Regulations, etc., 1873.
11. The Indian of New England and the northeastern Provinces . . . derived from Nicola Tenesles. 1851. 24 pp.
12. Fossil Wonders of a former World. 1874. 7 pp.

In addition to this list of publications I may mention two papers of some merit, perhaps, written by Barratt before he became too involved in his geological theorizing. One was called to my attention by Dr. Barnhart, entitled "The Geology of Middletown and Vicinity," pub-

lished in an extra edition or supplement of the "Sentinel and Witness," issued July 30, 1846, and the other mentioned to me by Prof. W. J. James as listed in Sabin's Dictionary of Books Relating to America, Vol. I, 1868, entitled "On the Tracks of Large Birds Found at Middletown, Conn." (Broadside, Middletown, July, 1846). Reference has already been made to Barratt's medical paper in the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*.

In Williams' American Medical Biography, printed in Greenfield, Mass., 1845, pages 390-401, there is an autobiographical letter dated Feb. 9, 1837, and addressed to Dr. Joseph Barratt, written by Thomas Miner, M.D., one of the most noted of the early physicians of Middletown.

A minor figure, though he was in the scientific annals of this country, it would appear from the foregoing account and especially from the sympathetic, yet critical estimate of Mr. Weatherby, that Dr. Barratt is entitled to fair recognition in the chief field of his labors and the hope is expressed that his name will appear and due credit be given him in some future biography of American botanists.

In collecting the data and preparing this sketch I am indebted to the kindly assistance of the following friends: Professor William North Rice, the Geologist, and Professor William J. James, the Librarian of Wesleyan University; Mr. Charles A. Pelton, the Druggist; Mr. Frank Farnsworth Starr, the Genealogist, all of Middletown; Mr. John H. Sage, the Ornithologist of Portland, Conn., Mr. C. A. Weatherby, the Botanist of East Hartford, Conn.; Dr. John Hendley Barnhart of the New York Botanical Garden, and Mr. Andrew Keogh, Librarian of Yale University.





